



CITY COUNCIL

Finance, Audit & Budget Committee

Meeting Report Tuesday, May 1, 2012

Committee Members Attending: D. Reed, Chair, R. Corcoran, Vice Chair

Others Attending: L. Kelleher, D. Buckley, C. Broad (DID), L. Olsen (Downtown 20/20), M. Polyak, M. Cianciosi, J. Haney, C. Gilfret, (Reading Parking Authority)

Ms. Reed, Chair, called the meeting to order at 5:05 pm. She stated that the purpose of this special Finance Committee Meeting is to provide a forum to discuss downtown parking issues and to develop solutions.

Mr. Buckley, Gilberts Furniture representing DID expressed the belief that parking enforcement and other parking problems deters customers from shopping downtown. He noted the statement at two (2) Downtown 20/20 public meetings “the people do not fear muggers and drug dealers, they fear the parking enforcement officer on the bike.” He stated that he realizes that the Parking Authority needs to cover its costs and has agreed to provide financial assistance to the City. He described his work to obtain parking tokens for downtown surface lots. Customers shopping at Gilberts are provided with tokens that provide free parking. The tokens are paid for by the purchasing business. He expressed the belief that the tokens turn a negative into a positive. He stressed the need to improve the downtown shopping experience. He noted that DID has been discussing parking issues and problems for many years.

Mr. Olsen, representing Downtown 20/20, stated that the resulting plan does not address parking or parking problems. However, he noted that parking problems were brought up at each of the three (3) public meetings to review the draft Downtown 20/20 plan. He described the token parking used in State College. He stated that he was the City’s first Economic Development Director under the DARE program which transformed into the Penn Square Commission and DID. He stated that parking issues were also discussed back then. He

expressed the belief that this forum provides a good opportunity to find mutually beneficial solutions. He suggested exploring practices used in other cities.

Mr. Polyak, representing the Reading Parking Authority (RPA) Board, agreed with the need to improve the viability of the downtown. He also agreed with the use and expansion of the token program on surface lots and at meters.

Mr. Cianciosi, representing the RPA, agreed with the remarks made by Mr. Polyak and noted the impact Act 47 has had on the RPA. However, he noted that reducing enforcement would reduce revenue and impede on the RPA's ability to provide financial assistance to the City. He also noted the decrease of the parking garage fees for events and the expansion of meter enforcement during events.

Mr. Corcoran inquired about revenue generated through enforcement. Ms. Gilfret stated that violations generated \$2.3M in 2011 city-wide. She stated that the RPA is willing and able to work with citizens and business owners to find solutions to parking issues. She noted that the two (2) surface lots at 7th and Penn and Cherry Streets generate \$60K annually on coin parking, not enforcement. She also noted that Judy's on Cherry uses \$10K on tokens per year at the garage at 3rd and Cherry.

Mr. Olsen noted that people are more resistant to walking from a parking lot or garage to a shopping destination downtown; however, they have no problem walking from Sears to Boscov's while at the Berkshire Mall. He also noted the incorrect perception people have of crime in garages.

Ms. Reed inquired about the use of the credit card meters. Mr. Haney stated that although there was a positive reaction to these meters, they were only used 10% of the time during the 90 day test period. He described the tests of various new parking meters.

Mr. Haney, in response to a question about removing the meters and chalking tires, stated that that application creates a staffing issue and would create a larger problem as a RPA officer would virtually need to continuously circle the downtown areas to chalk tires to stimulate people to move their vehicles. He expressed the belief that this scene would be more negative than the current application. He described the security upgrades to the parking garages and to the RPA website. He suggested adding downtown businesses to the existing map showing parking options based on the businesses' proximity to the parking facility.

Mr. Broad, representing DID, stated that meters in Harrisburg are \$1 per hour and Reading meters are \$1.50 per hour. He also noted that on RPA holidays the elevators in garages do not function. He suggested correcting that issue.

Mr. Morretti, a downtown business owner, described his parking issues at his clothing store. He also noted the disparity with enforcement at yellow-lined curbs. He also expressed the belief that the jump in the parking fine at the end of the initial 10 day period is excessive. He suggested adding change machines in various locations so customers can easily exchange bills for quarters.

Mr. Broad questioned Saturday enforcement. Mr. Haney stated that on Saturday meters are free and garages charge a fee. Mr. Broad questioned this rationale.

Ms. Reed suggested developing a shared message on parking. Mr. Haney described the commercials that are underway. He stated that the script is written and a filming schedule needs to be set. He stated that the busiest hours during the work week are between 10 am and 2 pm.

Ms. Gilfret stated that different merchants have different needs. She stated that if the merchants decided on a few plan options uniformity could be created in a cost effective manner.

The group discussed various applications and marketing needs.

Mr. Olsen stated that the Penn Corridor plan created six (6) areas. He suggested including parking guidance around these options.

Mr. Broad described the new mapping addition to the DID website that has the ability to show parking options.

Ms. Reed suggested that a core group of representatives from RPA, DID and the businesses meet to define some viable solutions. Those present agreed to have the core group meet within the next month and reconvene this meeting within two (2) months. The RPA was asked to coordinate.

As no other business was brought to the table the meeting adjourned at approximately 6:45 pm.

Respectfully submitted by Linda A. Kelleher CMC, City Clerk